BBC Learning English
Words in the News
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Millionth English word imminent

It is being claimed that the millionth word in the English language is about to be created. A US company which follows the use of language on the internet has made the prediction. However, traditional dictionary makers aren't so sure…. Lawrence Pollard reports:

The idea of the millionth word entering the English language is a brilliant bit of **public relations** for Texas-based Global Language Monitor. GLM runs a powerful search service which **monitors web traffic**. They make their money telling organisations how often their name is mentioned in new media, such as the internet.

What they can also do is search for **newly coined** words. Once a word has been used 25,000 times on social networking sites and such like, GLM declares it to be a new word. By their calculations a new word is created in English every 98 minutes, hence the estimate that the millionth word is about to be created.

If you talk to lexicographers, however, dictionary professionals, they tell a slightly different story. Dictionaries have **tighter criteria** about what **constitutes** a new word, for example, it has to be used over a certain period of time. Lexicographers will tell you that the exact size of English vocabulary is impossible to **quantify**, but if you accept every technical term or **obscure** specialist word then we're already way beyond a million. And if you **restrict inclusion of specialist slang,** then there are possibly three quarters of a million words in English. All of which is way beyond the 20 - 40,000 words that a fluent speaker would use, or the few thousand you could get by with in English. Basically with 1.5 billion people speaking some version of the language, it's **small wonder** English is the fastest growing **tongue** in the world.

Lawrence Pollard, Arts Correspondent, London

Vocabulary and definitions

public relations	the activity of keeping good relationships between an organisation and the people outside it - sometimes abbreviated to 'PR'
monitors web traffic	checks and keeps records of which websites people are visiting
newly coined	(refers to language only) recently invented or used for the first time
tighter criteria	stricter standards by which something is judged or decided
constitutes	is considered as
quantify	measure or count
obscure	not widely known
restrict inclusion of specialist slang	limit the addition of informal language
small wonder	not surprising
tongue	language

More on this story: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/8092549.stm

Read and listen to the story and the vocabulary online:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/language/wordsinthenews/2009/06/090610_witn_dict_page.shtml